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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, May 7, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FACTS ABOUT VEAL." Information from the Bureau of Animal Industry and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Our report from Washington gives the answer today to the old conundrum: "When is veal not veal?" It's easy to say, "When it becomes beef," but according to our correspondetn it's not so simple to determine just when that moment arrives.

One definition says veal can be the meat from calves at any age up to one year. But that definition is unsatisfactory to modern meat men because actually the line is drawn more on the basis of size and development than on age. With new methods of feeding and breeding, many calves graduate into beef long before their first birthday.

But even among calves there is a wide difference in their meat depending on their age and their feeding and their weight for their age. Consumers of course must buy all this widely varying meat under the one name of "veal", just as we buy baby beef, yearling, and older cattle meat all as "beef". We all know, practically speaking, that the kind of veal we get -- older or younger -- depends largely on where we buy it and what we pay.

But meat graders are not satisfied to call all this meat "veal". To them only the young calves that have lived exclusively on whole milk or on a diet producing the same kind of flesh qualify as "vealers". Usually these milk-fed "vealers" are under 12 weeks old -- most of them from 3 to 6 weeks old -- when they go to market. Meat from the older calves comes under the heading of "calf".

This is the big season for finding the most milk-fed veal on the market in proportion to the amount of older calf meat. Of course, there is always some milk-fed veal available, since these young calves mostly represent a surplus from the dairy industry and in modern dairies they arrange to have calves arrive the year around to stabilize their milk supply. But on most average farms, spring is the time for calves to arrive, so right now and during the next two months more young vealers come to market than at any other time of year.

According to our information, consumers can't expect to be able to make sure they are getting milk-fed veal rather than older calf just by looking, unless they have the eye of a meat grader. I don't think many of us are troubled by the problem of getting veal that is not tender for average purposes. But I have here the points looked for by the meat graders representing the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in Washington, when they put the stamp of highest quality on veal.

According to the experts, we find more fat on the top grades of veal than on the lower grades, though of course no veal has much fat in comparison with beef or pork. We should get a general impression of plumpness in a good piece of veal as we watch the butcher cut it.

This fat-quality correlation holds good within certain limits for all meat animals, but especially for veal. Fat is such a mark of quality that even in young milk-fed vealers the ones that are lightweight for their age cannot make the top grade -- "Prime or A Number 1." The animals of medium weight can make the top grade but there are five grades, running down to "Common". But in the heavyweight veal class, weighing over 110 pounds, there are only four grades -- the top four. You simply could not find a heavyweight vealer that was below the medium grade.

To go on with the points the meat grader looks for in high quality veal: the flesh should be firm, very fine-grained, and velvety, and a pinkish brown color. The bone is a very red color and as the butcher cuts it will be very soft.

The consumer who buys the top Government grade of veal -- that is "Prime" - is sure to get the milk-fed vealer meat because no older calf meat is eligible for this grade. Of course that's a pretty rare grade of veal to find, but this highest grade milk-fed vealer sets the standard, and all calves are measured from there, so the consumer who looks for these standards, or who can make absolutely sure by buying Government-graded veal, runs the best chance of getting the best veal, younger or older. "Prime" is top, then comes "choice"; third rank is "good" Below that come the grades "medium" and "common" but we won't find much Government graded veal below "good".

The Government grade mark is a purple stamp, one word to the line, continuously repeated. The first line carries the letters "U.S.". The second line has the grade, such as "choice". The third line shows the class of the animal, such as "veal" or "calf", and on the fourth line are the initials B A E, standing for Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Bureau in the Department of Agriculture responsible for all Government meat grading. The Government grading of meat is done only when the packer requests the service. It is not compulsory.

The grade stamp has a different significance from the Federal inspection stamp, which assures consumers that the meat is wholesome and edible from the point of view of health and hygiene. This is a little round stamp saying "U. S. Inspected and Passed" or an abbreviation of those words. All meat from plants selling in interstate commerce is required to be federally inspected. That means about two-thirds of the total slaughter.

Just the fact that the stamp is purple, our correspondent reminds us, is no sign that it is necessarily a Government guarantee either of health inspection or of grade. Sometimes you'll see grade recommendations by private companies stamped on meat. So it's well to read what the stamp says.

In case consumers are discouraged by the price of veal cutlets there is good news that price has been going down. Of course veal cutlet never goes as far down as the price of a good many other cuts of meat, but other cuts of veal are much less expensive. Another silver lining for veal consumers is the proportion of lean meat to fat. You get more lean meat in a pound of veal than in a pound of any other meat. That cuts down the fuel contribution which fat meat makes, but fat is not such a problem in the budget as lean meat food values are. So the most conscientious budgeteer need not feel guilty when she spends money for veal, which is relatively richer in protein, minerals, and vitamins than the same amount of any other meat.